

## LESSON: Civic Engagement, Sit-Ins, and Protest

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle School

**SUBJECT:** Civics, Government, Public Activism

**TIME REQUIRED:** 45-60 minutes

This lesson is meant to exemplify and expand upon ideas of civic participation by discussing sit-ins and forms of protest.

### RATIONALE

This lesson explores how protest (and specifically sit-ins) influenced the course of desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement in America. Students will evaluate the effects that sit-ins had on local and national behavior and policy.

NOTE: This lesson is designed as part of a series on types of political activism. It can be adapted to fit a unit of this topic as needed.

This lesson plan and materials needed to teach it can be found at the Thurgood Marshall Institute: <https://tminstitutelfd.org/>

### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can ordinary citizens interact with and influence their local and national governments?
- What is a sit-in? How does it work?
- What are the benefits and limitations of sit-ins?
- What do sit-ins illuminate about the realities of “separate but equal”?

#### OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

After the lesson, students will...

- Define what a sit-in is and how it can be used.
- Analyze how sit-ins and protests can be useful in making change.
- Question how protests and sit-ins (especially during the Civil Rights Movement) were evaluated by majority populations.

#### PREPARING TO TEACH

- Students should have a foundational (or introductory) knowledge of segregation, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and the Civil Rights Movement prior to this lesson.
- Teachers should:
  - Collect (at least) one copy of each of the following books: *Freedom on the Menu* by Carole Boston Weatherford and Jerome Lagarrigue, *Moving Forward: From Space-Age Rides to Civil Rights Sit-Ins with Airman Alton Yates* by Chris Barton

and Steffi Walthall, and *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* by Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney.

- Gather large pieces of poster board, markers, and craft supplies as needed.

## **SCAFFOLDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS**

### *Reading support...*

If needed, any of the following supports can be provided for students in order to facilitate reading and comprehension.

- Teachers may provide students with a list of important or recurring vocabulary words and their definitions.
- Teachers may read all three books with their entire class before releasing students to their book project groups.

### *Differentiation...*

Ideas for reading support mentioned above can be helpful for adjusting this lesson to match different classes. Additionally, teachers should always consider how verbal and/or written instructions might best benefit their class. Teachers may also consider limiting or elevating the number of picture books used in order to match the speed and comprehension work of the class (or of different students). The groups created in this lesson can also be manipulated as teachers see fit to support different students. Additionally, options for the book projects are included in the lesson for teachers to choose and adjust.

### *Adjusting for high school grades...*

To teach this lesson to high schoolers, different (or additional) books may be chosen to advance the reading level of the provided content. However, the value of picture books and their ability to teach should not be underestimated (regardless of the age of students). Teachers may also choose to add a personal/group research element to the final book projects for older or more advanced students. Teachers may also edit the included discussion questions as needed.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SEQUENCE**

1. Review any necessary information/history with students to prepare them for the content of the lesson.
2. Divide students into three groups and assign each group to read one of the selected picture books. Provide students time to read and discuss the book as a group using the following questions:
  - a. What is the main idea of the book? What is the large lesson or theme this book is trying to communicate?
  - b. What is the political action that was taken during the course of the book? How was this action organized/decided on?
  - c. What did these political activists want? What issues did they care about? Were they successful?
  - d. How were the political activists treated by different groups of people?

- e. What were the outcomes of the political activism?
3. Invite the students to come back together as a whole class and provide instruction about the following project: Students, in their groups, will be creating a mini presentation on their picture book and the information it communicates. The format in which students create and present their projects may be decided by the teacher or left up to the discretion of the students. Encourage students to use the previous discussion questions to formulate their project. Included below is a list of ideas for what students may be required to include in their project:
  - a. Summarize the main events of the book.
  - b. Explain what a sit-in is using the book as an example.
  - c. Highlight a single figure in the book and their political activism.
  - d. Give a chronology of the political activism in your book.
  - e. Create a visual aid or chart to represent the impact of your book's sit-in.
  - f. Highlight a challenge in your book and how the characters worked to overcome it.
4. Invite the book groups to present their projects to the class.
5. Bring the class back together as a whole to reflect on the projects using the following questions:
  - a. What forms of political activism did you find in your books?
  - b. What common ideas did you notice among your book projects?
  - c. How would you explain the challenges faced by civil rights protesters? Where did those challenges come from? Why were protesters challenged?
  - d. Why do you think the Civil Rights Movement used sit-ins and protests to create change?

## **ASSESSMENT**

Teachers can evaluate student learning by watching the book presentations and listening to small and large groups' discussions. Teachers may consider creating an exit ticket or final reflection for this lesson to better gauge student learning experiences as needed.